

Comparison of gender differences in predictors of psychological distress in parents of children with cancer

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Background: Reports published over the last few decades present contradictory findings about the psychological distress and coping patterns of parents whose children have cancer.

Aims: Gender differences of parental predictors (including parenting distress, illness severity, the style of coping responses) of psychological distress (including anxiety, depression and somatization) experienced by Taiwanese mothers and fathers (164 couples) whose children were undergoing treatment for cancer were investigated.

Method: Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the predictors of psychological distress between mothers and fathers whose child had cancer. It hypothesizes that social support, parenting stress, coping style directly effect psychological distress; and that coping style also serves as an indirect mediator from social support and parenting stress to psychological distress.

Results: The findings indicate that the different modelings were supported for both mothers and fathers; although it was with different magnitude. For mothers, the relationships of social support and parenting stress to psychological distress appear to be mediated through coping style, with no path among social support, problem-focused, and emotion-focused coping was calculated. For fathers, the relationship of social support and parenting stress to psychological distress appears to be mediated through coping style without the path relation between problem-focused coping and psychological distress.

Conclusions: This finding indicates the need for a thorough psychiatric consultation at the time of diagnosis for children who have cancer and their families. Ongoing psychosocial support and education should have been integral components of the treatment program when relapse occurred.